



**PALGRAVE STUDIES IN TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING**

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# Translating Tourism

Cross-Linguistic Differences  
of Alternative Worldviews

Sofia Malamatidou

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# Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting

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Sofia Malamatidou

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*To Andreas & Alexandra*

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## Praise for *Translating Tourism*

“Sofia Malamatidou offers a comprehensive and insightful study of cross-linguistic differences in the promotion of tourist destinations and of the way these differences are managed in translation. This book’s originality lies not only in its empirical nature but also in its multilingual perspective which includes six different language combinations, namely English (both American and British), French, Greek, and Russian. Indeed, tourist texts are based on a circular process involving cultural encounters: the way a destination is presented to readers is imbued with the socio-cultural features of that place or nation; at the same time, these texts are culturally filtered through the perceptions and expectations of reader-tourists. By providing a series of interesting analyses, Sofia Malamatidou shows that studying tourism discourse and its translation allows us to understand how cross-cultural communication works or should work and how ‘we humans try to make sense of the world around us’.

A must read for experts and students in marketing and tourism studies and in translation studies, this book is an excellent contribution to the ongoing research on cross-cultural tourism discourse.”

—Elena Manca, *Associate Professor of English Linguistics and Translation, University of Salento, Italy*

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# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In recent years, public discussion around tourism has grown. Whether it is over-tourism in places like Barcelona and the effect this has on the local population, the unprecedented standstill of all tourism activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this affected economies worldwide, or more recently the effects of climate change on tourism patterns and what tourism might look like in the future, we have finally started to realise that tourism is not simply a leisurely, frivolous activity, but rather a collective human behaviour deeply ingrained in the fabric of modern life, influencing it and being influenced by it. This realisation has brought with it another one: tourism practices might need to change in the future, for example to create space for more sustainable tourism or rebrand cooler places as summer destinations. The discussion of these changes normally revolves around government policies and marketing campaigns, which are undoubtedly central if any change is to be designed and implemented.

However, what is rarely, if at all discussed, is the important role that language (and by extension cross-linguistic variation) plays in shaping tourism practices and the key role that translation plays in tourism promotion. The language found in translated texts aiming to promote tourism is often criticised for its low quality and errors (such as a sign in Greece informing visitors that there are ‘rooms to rent with atomic baths’—meaning ensuite), yet it is one of the most crucial tools through which international tourism is promoted (Sulaiman and Wilson 2019). During the process of writing this book, I have been involved in a number of conversations with national destination promoters of different countries and almost universally their reaction to the mention of the importance of language is one of complete unawareness. On one occasion, when asked about the importance of cross-linguistic differences in tourism promotion, a senior member of a tourism board replied that it is important to avoid any puns or idioms so as to facilitate translation. This sort of narrow understanding of the importance of language in tourism texts and the ways in which it is translated is widespread in the tourism industry. Even if there is some understanding of the varied cultural and linguistic markets that a destination aims to attract, this is very rarely reflected in the importance assigned to tourism language and how it is translated, which ultimately remains a purely semantic activity, that is, focusing almost exclusively on meaning. This results in pragmatic (e.g. how the promotional effect is achieved) and stylistic (e.g. what tone is being adopted) factors, among others, often being ignored. What is also ignored are cultural considerations that go beyond culture-specific items, such as how the readers and potential tourists might perceive and experience the world around them (which will be examined in this book). But it is not just the tourism and hospitality sector that pays little attention to tourism language and translation. Translation scholars have also not really engaged with research on tourism texts. It is revealing that while degrees, seminars, and workshops focusing on the translation of all sorts of subject fields (e.g. medical, legal, business, literary, etc.) are widely available at least in the Western world, similar training regarding tourism translation is hard to find (Durán Muñoz 2011), suggesting a conspicuous gap in translation research and by extension translation training.

This unawareness of the importance of language and translation in tourism-related texts needs to change, if it is to support destination promotion and facilitate the changes in tourism patterns we want to see in the future. This can only be achieved if we first gain a clear and critical understanding of the central role translation plays in destination promotion. What seems to be missing is an in-depth understanding of the crucial link between tourism translation, destination promotion, and how different people experience the world around them differently. Such an understanding would benefit not only translators who work with tourism texts but also destination promoters who want to attract a wider and more diverse audience.

Finally, there is perhaps no better example than tourism texts to reveal alternative worldviews, since these texts quite literally present the outside world to their readers. Tourism texts offer a window into how we perceive the world, which elements of it we prioritise, and how we relate to it through language. Therefore, tourism translation is much more than simply translating words. It is also about translating *worlds*. For translations of tourism texts to be successful, they need to present the worldview of the target culture while also accommodating the worldview of the reader. This connection between tourism texts and our perception of the world, and how it relates to destination promotion, has not been touched upon in previous studies focusing on the translation of tourism texts. As a result, our understanding of the conceptually complex mechanisms that allow different worldviews to be reconciled through translation remains fragmented and limited, and translations of tourism texts cannot fulfil their full potential to (re)create a destination image, a concept which will be explained in detail in Chapter 2, that is to be able to turn readers into visitors.

## 1.2 Aim

This book provides, for the first time, a large-scale empirical multilingual study of the cross-linguistic differences in the language of destination promotion, how they are negotiated in translation, and how, in doing so, the translated text reflects and reconciles different worldviews (that of the

destination population and that of the reader-tourist). The concept of the reader-tourist is an important one and will be adopted throughout this book: the recipient of the tourism text is a reader in the first instance but has the potential to become a tourist, and it is this potential that tourism texts capitalise on.

Language, and by extension the analysis of linguistic differences, is understood in the present book in a broad sense as a means for encoding and describing our reality and for talking about the world around us. For example, societies that do not have the concept of Santa Claus will not have a word for it, while societies where politeness is a key concept will have many linguistic means for expressing it. Our linguistic choices reflect our perceived reality, and it is in this broad sense that I understand the link between language and cultural issues in this book. Also, ‘linguistic’ is used as a label to capture both semantic and pragmatic considerations (and potentially others, but these are not explored here), and appreciation of both, as will be shown in Chapter 3, is important when it comes to the translation of tourism texts. Therefore, I am also interested here in the communicative purpose of tourism texts, which is primarily promotional, and how this can be encoded in linguistic choices.

Data are taken from official tourism websites promoting tourism in the USA, UK, France, Greece, and Russia. Most previous studies have focused on English/Spanish or English/Italian—languages associated with a strong tourism industry—ignoring languages such as Greek, French, and Russian, whose respective countries were in the 10 most visited European destinations (UNWTO 2018), with France actually ranking first. Therefore, all languages examined here are associated with strong tourism promotion, either long-standing (e.g. Greece and France) or more recent (e.g. Russia). Although, during the course of writing this book, the situation regarding Russia as an international tourism destination has undoubtedly changed, data from this language are still examined, as they provide useful insights into how a society that is not typically ‘Western’ might employ tourism language for destination promotion and how it might perceive tourism more generally. Finally, by including two varieties of English, it is possible to examine whether there is indeed a universal version of English for tourism or whether different



societies (i.e. American and British) approach destination promotion differently.

Official tourism websites have been deliberately chosen here, for both practical and scholarly reasons. On the one hand, these websites offer rich multilingual data, often being translated into many languages, while they also place much greater emphasis on the destination image than other types of tourism texts. On the other hand, they represent the official narrative of the destination concerning how it is to be perceived by both the local population and the rest of the world. As such, they are not only promotional, but to a large extent ideological, with a significant potential to shape perceptions about the destination. This particular ideological potential of tourism texts will be explored in the two case studies that form part of the present book.

Specifically, the book aims to examine:

- Differences in the linguistic means used to promote destinations in English (American and British), French, Greek, and Russian and what these specific linguistic choices can tell us about how these societies view the world around them.
- Whether and to what extent these differences are taken into account during translation, that is, whether translated texts stay close to source texts or meet the expectations of reader-tourists in the target language.
- What the implications are for destination promotion: how to convert readers into visitors and manage their expectations and how translation can become a field of active (re)construction of destination identity.

To achieve its aims, this book uses a corpus (i.e. a large electronic collection of texts) that I have specifically compiled for the purposes of this book, to examine linguistic patterns contributing to destination promotion. Specifically, the book examines the TrAIL (Tourism Across and In-between Languages) corpus, a 2 million-word corpus of both translated and non-translated tourism texts. Texts are taken from official tourism websites in English (American and British), French, Greek, and Russian and, where available, their translations into these languages (e.g. Greek into English, Greek into French, Greek into Russian, English into

French, Russian into English, etc.), promoting the UK and the USA, France, Greece, and Russia, respectively. A unique aspect of the book is that it is not limited to a specific language pair, but rather covers at least six different language combinations between English, French, Greek, and Russian, thus making this the first multilingual comprehensive study of its kind. Moreover, the book offers a rare insight into how English tourism texts are translated into other languages, a phenomenon typically neglected, despite the popularity of English-speaking destinations.

Interdisciplinarity is a distinctive element of the book, which goes beyond previous studies conducted in translation studies, and which combines research conducted in linguistics, translation studies, and tourism studies. Tourism texts offer translation studies a perfect test bed for the exploration of how different worldviews can be reconciled, while the detailed analysis of tourism texts educates tourism studies about the importance of cross-linguistic adaptation. Bringing these fields together, the book challenges traditional views of tourism translation as a field mainly preoccupied with semantic meaning and reveals the importance of tourism translation as an intellectual field that can offer valuable insight about how we perceive the world around us and how we relate to alternative worldviews.

The book focuses on the two elements that are indispensable for tourism to take place, which form the basis of the two case studies presented in the book. These are the ‘things to do’ and ‘places to go’ elements, or in other words the tourist and the destination. These case studies can be expanded into questions: What are the tourists encouraged to do when visiting a place? and How is physical space described and promoted? Each of these two case studies, the rationale for which is presented in more detail in Chapter 4, focuses on different linguistic features. Verbs are examined to reveal how tourists are expected to behave and engage with the destination and are therefore associated with the ‘things to do’ element, while adjectives are examined to help understand how physical space is described and presented to the reader-tourists and therefore are associated with the ‘places to go’ element. However, the discussion does not focus on a purely linguistic analysis resulting in a long list of verbs and adjectives preferred in one language or another. Rather the case studies are linked to key considerations in tourism,

namely the concepts of tourism phase and tourist gaze. These concepts, which are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 8, respectively, offer an interpretive framework which supports the idea that tourism, and its associated elements, is not experienced or perceived in the same way across the world, but rather that important cross-cultural differences are expected. Briefly, tourism phase suggests that tourism as an activity is realised on a continuum from the sightseeing to the post-sightseeing phase, with different societies positioned at different points on this continuum. This is, therefore, a useful concept for the investigation of the 'things to do' element since it can provide an interpretive framework for why certain societies show preference for specific activities associated with tourism (e.g. simply moving through space vs exploring it). Tourist gaze suggests that the way we 'gaze' at the world around us, especially while acting as tourists, is subjective and differs depending on the cultural background, among other things, and serves as a useful framework for exploring how physical space is described and is, therefore, used for the examination of the 'where to go' element. Both concepts have as a starting point the (potential) tourist and their perceptions of tourism and its elements. They are considered to be complementary and aim to approach the same phenomenon from slightly different angles.

Relying on these concepts for the interpretation of results significantly enhances the interdisciplinarity element of the book and allows for a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena under investigation to be obtained. The focus in this book is on how these concepts (i.e. phases of tourism and tourism gaze) are manifested linguistically. By approaching linguistic choices made in tourism texts as meaningful and dynamic, shaping and being shaped by socio-cultural factors, it is possible to understand how these different elements come together to create a certain worldview, and also how translation navigates its way through different, and potentially competing, worldviews. This understanding is indispensable if we are to improve intercultural communication through translation, especially in the case of tourism, a field that offers a unique opportunity to experience other perspectives. Moreover, the book is relevant not only to practicing translators, but also to scholars interested in issues around tourism, promotion, and translation. From an intellectual perspective, the book foregrounds translation as a space where

cross-linguistic differences around how we view the world around us can be negotiated. From a vocational perspective, the book will help translators of tourism texts reflect on their practice and ultimately produce translations that perform their aim more effectively. In turn, this can help transform the tourism industry and have a positive impact on the economies that rely on it. Finally, the book will also be of interest to destination promoters who aim to understand better the importance that language and translation play in tourism promotion.

### 1.3 Outline

This book aims to provide an account of tourism translation as a field where multiple and often competing worldviews can be negotiated and to showcase the significant potential it has to influence how the destination image is perceived and ultimately the promotional potential of the tourism message. It does not assume any prior knowledge of the topics discussed, each of which will be introduced in detail and with appropriate examples.

The book is divided into eleven chapters; this chapter and Chapter 11 introduce, and respectively, round off the volume while the remaining chapters are organised into three main parts: a theoretical, a methodological, and an analytical one.

Chapters 2 and 3 constitute the theoretical part of the book, which provides the background, reviewing research in tourism translation and emphasising its importance. It assumes that tourism translation is an interdisciplinary activity which requires an understanding of key concepts from a range of fields. Therefore, this part provides insights from the fields of marketing, tourism studies, as well as translation studies. Examining how exactly tourism promotion is achieved and the role that cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences play in it allows us to understand the complex dynamics behind it, which are critical not only when non-translated tourism texts are produced, but more importantly in the case of this book, when tourism texts are translated into other languages, as they often are.

The discussion begins in Chapter 2 with an exploration of the language of promotion more generally and its relationship to the language of tourism, how exactly destination promotion is achieved and the importance of the Tourism Destination Image (TDI), as well as the main functions of the tourism text and how they are realised linguistically. The aim of this chapter is to clearly show that tourism discourse shares many of the typical features of advertising language and that its main aim is to promote a particular destination and create a positive image of it. Although this might appear as an obvious fact, there is surprisingly very little awareness around it from scholars and practitioners both in tourism studies and in translation studies. Chapter 3 focuses on translation studies more specifically and shows how this lack of awareness is manifested in the focus of extant research in the field. The vast majority of existing research is preoccupied with the semantic properties of texts, with pragmatic properties only rarely examined and not considered in light of the complex dynamics that need be taken into account for successful tourism texts to be produced. The theoretical part of the book closes with a discussion of the approach adopted in the two case studies which aims to uncover the missing link between the micro-level (i.e. linguistic features) and the macro-level (i.e. the socio-cultural considerations) analysis of tourism texts, and aims to understand how the socio-cultural preferences of how people perceive and experience the world around them are reflected in and realised through specific linguistic choices.

After establishing the importance of examining tourism texts in relation to the socio-cultural dynamics in which they have been produced, as well as the general mechanisms through which they turn readers into tourists, the book moves on, in Chapter 4, to the methodological part, which serves as a bridge between the theoretical and analytical parts, explaining how exactly the ideas discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 will be empirically investigated in the rest of the book. Since a corpus methodology focusing on official tourism websites is adopted, an overview of available data and how they have been selected and organised into a corpus is presented together with the corpus triangulation methodology that is employed for their analysis. A unique element of the book is that it provides a concrete methodology for the examination of adaptation

patterns in translated texts which is informed by quantitative findings. It is worth noting that Chapter 4 provides an overview of the methodology employed in the two case studies, while the detailed methodological considerations of each case study are discussed in Chapters 5 and 8, respectively.

Chapters 5–10 constitute the final (and largest) part of the book, which has a strong analytical focus, providing details about the two case studies briefly presented earlier. The chapters for each case study follow the same pattern: an introduction to each case study and what it focuses on, as well as the specific methodology employed (Chapters 5 and 8), an analysis with detailed examples of non-translated texts (Chapters 6 and 9), and an analysis with examples of the adaptation patterns noted in translated texts (Chapters 7 and 10). For each case study, a clear link is provided between what element of tourism is being examined, how it is assumed to manifest itself linguistically, and what it reveals about how different societies perceive and experience tourism. Specifically, case study I (Chapters 5–7) focuses on tourist behaviour, that is how tourists are expected to behave and engage with the destination, which is examined through an analysis of verbs where the tourist is the actor or agent, which can provide information about the tourism phase that each society is experiencing. Case study II (Chapters 8–10) focuses on the destination, that is, how it is described and presented to the reader-tourists, which is examined through an analysis of adjectives modifying physical space. This provides information about the concept of tourist gaze and how it differs cross-linguistically. Overall, this book aims to make a significant contribution to challenging existing assumptions around the language of tourism and offer for the first time valuable insight into the important role that language plays not only in promoting tourism activities, but also in allowing people to talk about the world around them and their position in it.